

O Soul, My Soul!

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THE HEAVENLY PSYCHE

*Earth must transform herself and equal Heaven
Or Heaven descend into earth's mortal state.
But for such vast spiritual change to be.
Out of the mystic cavern in man's heart
The heavenly Psyche must put off her veil
And step into common nature's crowded rooms
And stand uncovered in that nature's front
And rule its thoughts and fill the body and life.*

— *Sri Aurobindo*

O SOUL, MY SOUL!

The soul is joy, it is thrill, it is bliss, it is freedom, it is freshness, it is hope, it is certitude, it is sure existence, it is continuity. It is truly a wonder, a marvel, a deep mystery.

The Gita says, "One sees it as a mystery, another speaks of it as a mystery, still another hears of it as a mystery, but even on hearing of it, not one knows it." (ch.2.29) The Gita speaks of the soul a great deal and in many contexts, but this verse sums up its descriptions by the use of the word 'Ascharya' over and over again. 'Ascharya' is what evokes surprise, wonder, what is felt as mysterious and marvellous.

We often found Mother's ways mysterious and difficult to understand. She explained that when She saw a person, all that She was interested in seeing was the state of the soul in him. Was it sufficiently developed, bright and luminous, influential and active or too submerged and withdrawn, passive and a silent witness and not bright enough. If the soul sparkled in the eyes, then no vices of life mattered, he was a fine man.

The Mother once asked a young man, who happened to be placed in a situation of new experiences and strong external sensations, how his soul felt about it all, what his soul said to all that. Ordinarily, we are carried by the sensations and we do not, we cannot, withdraw from them a little and consult our soul, our deepest and best friend. And if we succeeded in doing so, we would immediately feel free and would no more feel lost in the crowding sensations.

The soul in us is the best thing. It is joy itself, free and master of the circumstances. It is security and safety itself. But it is really the

thing we know nothing of. In fact, we have no feeling for it. We are so exclusively all the time engrossed in the external things. We are brought up that way, educated and trained that way, we feel the things worth knowing are all external. Thus we lose contact with the soul, which we had in a measure when our external engrossment was not so heavy.

Mother has even said it with emphasis that the education which draws out and fixes the attention on the external things and causes a loss of contact with the soul is not the right thing, whatever may be its value for earning a living. The sense and the feeling for the soul should really grow from more to more, it should become active and dynamic and the guiding principle of life that it, in fact, is by its nature and thus bring about unity, integration and true creativity in life.

The educational project initiated and worked out by the Mother exactly aims at affording to the children an atmosphere, an environment, a training and an education all breathing such a spirit of freedom that the least external suppression is caused, and in consequence the soul has the best chance of coming to the front and exercising its unifying influence on the mind, on the varied impulses, on the bodily movements.

Today education normally recognises integration of personality as an ideal and much emphasis is laid on the education of the whole man. But how is integration to be achieved? How is the whole man to be realised? Only if we have a feeling and appreciation of the quality of the soul and seek to afford to it the opportunity to grow and exercise its harmonising influence on the outer members of our personality, our mind, life and body, could this be done.

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother just aimed at that quality in education and it provides a real solution to what education today

basically seeks, the quality of integration and wholeness.

Lately we have had an exhibition at the Centre of Education of the Ashram — an exhibition of artistic work on cloth, drawings, paintings, poems and essays of boys and girls mainly of 12 to 14 years of age. The most striking thing in all this was what the students wrote in answer to the question — ‘What does your soul look like?’ The answers were accompanied by drawings too as to how the soul looked to them. These answers had, of course, a lot which belongs to the general atmosphere of the Ashram. But there were also statements which were very original, very vivid, very true, clearly showing that the students had some definite feeling for the soul. The drawings too were interesting. Many represented a flame in different forms. A few flowers — a rose, a lotus, etc. Some as a fruit, whole or cut in the middle with the core conspicuous. Quite a few as a formation of concentric circles with a prominent centre. A few represented an expanse without any form. Almost each drawing had an originality about it.

The striking sentences of a few students are presented here and we might try to see and feel what the student concerned has really felt within and what is the kind of feeling he has for the mysterious inner fact of the soul.

1. My soul is a thing I cannot see but I can feel. I can guess how my soul looks, it is a misty figure, it has no eyes nor legs. It is smoke that goes about, ... if we would like to feel or talk to it we can. I think I have heard it when I do a wrong thing. Before I used to hear it, but after some time I never cared for it and after that I never heard it. Now-a-days I hear it some times but not always. . .
2. Perhaps my soul looks somewhat like a bluish white gas. . . It

is like a seed in a fruit, which if one wants, can always go on and on existing. When a fruit is eaten up or rotten, the seed remains. If we take it out and replant it, it can give another tree or plant.

Sometimes our soul talks to us of something higher and superior which we ought to do. It always stays within ourselves and talks to no other person than us. It gives us good advice. When it talks to us, we really feel something from within which we cannot express.

3. I think my soul looks like a star which is always lit even in the dark... The soul talks to me very softly. But I can't see or feel it. I can hear it only when I am quiet and calm and when I want to hear it. I think I could hear the soul better when I was small.
4. Whenever I sit still and quietly, I feel something soft in me. It purifies my mind and makes it clean again by pouring nice things in it. It makes me happy and glad. Sometimes when I sit for the meditation, I think something is glowing in me and it helps me meditate deeper and deeper on God.

Sometimes the glowing is transparent and sometimes it is blue. And once it pricked me and I could see that the light in me was fading. Sometimes I feel that I am empty and nothing is in me and I feel as light as a balloon. . .

5. The soul is an unknown thing to me. I never see it nor do I imagine it, but I feel it. . .

There are moments when I can hear the soft voice of my pure soul which echoes through my mind. It is when I am calm and silent with a high aspiration for the divine. That's when I feel an extraordinary change in myself. The soul is a very

peculiar little thing to me but the voice is very well known.

6. My soul is oval. I trust my soul as I trust my brain. It is beautiful. I like it very much. . . It cares for me as a brother. If I feel sad, it makes me happy and joyous. . . It is very playful. It jumps here and there. When it is big, it jumps out of our body. It is small as my wrist. It is my only best true friend. . .
7. My soul is an invisible thing. Sometimes when I am quiet and happy I hear it. . . I don't hear anything when I shout and become angry.
8. I think that my soul is like a small, sweet, pleasant and powerful man. It tells me nice things. It seems that it hides behind my heart. My soul wants me to be absolutely pure, obedient, to be considerate and have a good man's spirit. Every one may leave me but my soul will never. I am sure that it loves me and I love it too.

How interesting these answers read! Clear and vivid, original and direct. The soul, as it were, becomes vibrant in us and we seem to feel the thrill of it. It is surprising, the students were able to have that inward look, that inward feeling, that inward observation and write with such discrimination what they saw and felt. Surely they are open to it, are in some contact with it and do enjoy its pleasant influence. It must be moulding them in its own quality of harmony and unity.

FINDING THE SOUL

Finding the soul is all the issue of life. One must be first what one really is. One must get right oneself first. If a person is himself wrong, how can his actions be right!

When the Buddha, after his enlightenment, was yet pondering whether to share his realisation with others or to keep it to himself and was staying in a forest near Banaras, he saw one day a group of young people making merry round about where he was. At one time he saw them worried and he called them and asked what the matter was. They said, 'We were playing hide and seek sort of thing and now we find one of us is missing. We have lost him. We have searched long and we cannot find him.' The Buddha sympathised with them, felt deep compassion for them, but then asked a question, 'Supposing one loses oneself, not another, a companion, what should one do?' They all felt intrigued and perplexed and asked with much curiosity, 'How can one lose oneself?' The Buddha replied emphatically, 'But that is exactly the case, you have all lost yourself, you do not know who you are?' They felt, as it were, stunned by the powerful affirmation, yet they were clear that they knew who they were and inquired, 'How can that be?' The Buddha then asked, 'All right, tell me, who you are.' One said, 'I am so and so', another, 'Am so and so's son', a third 'I live at such and such a place.' The Buddha rebutted all this strongly, saying, 'I do not ask your name or your father's name or the name of the street you live in, I ask, who you yourself are.' They all felt deeply puzzled and shaken within and felt that they really did not know who or what they were.

This story can easily induce in us that same state of surprise and wonder at our ignorance regarding this primary sort of fact as to

what we are. The more we think of it, the worse is our regret and disappointment with ourselves.

Now, why we are normally by nature placed in a wrong awareness of ourselves and why finding of the soul is ordinarily so difficult an adventure are highly intriguing questions, to which answers are very many and perhaps none is felt satisfactory. We are so hard set in our present formation of self-hood that another conception is emotionally unacceptable even though intellectually it may be, on the whole, convincing.

It is, in fact, much simpler and truer to facts that we take things as they are and not ask why it is so, why we are all in a lost sort of condition and why we have to find ourselves in order that we may be able to live properly with clarity, certitude and confidence.

The things are plain enough. Our present form is one of insecurity, instability, shakiness, vacillation, anxiety, struggle, sorrow, regret, etc., etc. We seek external props of security but do not have a sureness of self-existence. We seek external sensations of pleasure, but do not feel joyous by ourselves. Surely we do see lot of confidence and joy and certitude round about us. But if we examine closely, they are not sound and strong enough and there is always an inner fear and anxiety present in us.

However, our experience does clearly show to us that the more superficial, the more externally dependent sort of persons constitute one class and those who are more self-collected and given to a deeper posture of life constitute another class. The latter enjoy, on the whole, a fuller satisfaction.

These are facts of life free from any philosophical speculation. Now, do these facts not show clearly enough what we are and what we have to become. Is it too much to say that by nature we are

poised superficially and then we feel insecure and lost. If, however, we seek to go deeper and deeper within ourselves, we feel surer, clearer and fuller.

Finding of the soul is essentially a process of inner exploration, of discovering and identifying the movements at their source in consciousness, of progressively disengaging ourselves from the less satisfying identifications and building up the more satisfying ones, until we discover at the centre deepest within the object of spontaneous attraction and absolute satisfaction. Then we know what we are spontaneously and live and act with clarity, certitude and confidence.

Of course, this process is a long one and since the inner realm is a wide and a complex one, our exploration is always beset with difficulty and doubt. But that is how the inner discriminations are built up. And what is more important is that the exploration must proceed in a spirit of freedom and detachment.

In this connection, we might also get clear about the two types of persons called extroverts and introverts. To the former, the external things alone are real. To the latter, in a sort of reaction, the inner states engage most of the attention. In fact, we should cultivate a due awareness of ourselves as well as of our external situation. Then alone we can build up and enjoy inner harmony as also external mastery.

Savitri's sadhana as narrated by Sri Aurobindo in his epic poem is really that of inner exploration and of finding the soul and it is extremely interesting to read about the course followed by her in her search for the soul. The call comes to her in these words:

Find out thy soul, recover thy hid self,
In silence seek God's meaning in thy depths.
Then mortal nature change to the divine.

She is roused by this call to the adventure. In the words of the book,

She looked into herself and sought for her soul.

She goes deeper and deeper within traversing many inner countries. These inner countries are by themselves fine and tempting. She feels attracted at one place, but then says,

Here I can stay not, for I seek my soul.

And at last she arrives and her last experience is described in these words:

A house was there all made of flame and light
And crossing a wall of doorless living fire
There suddenly she met her secret soul.

What a joy comes to our entire outer personality at that time!

Then lifts the mind a cry of victory:
"O soul, my soul, we have created Heaven,
Within we have found the kingdom here of God,
His fortress built in a loud ignorant world.
Our life is entrenched between two rivers of Light,
We have turned space into a gulf of peace
And made the body a Capitol of bliss.

What more, what more, if more must still be done?"

Sri Aurobindo also gives a thrilling account of an entire world of souls, the psychic world. A single person with soul-realisation is a marvellous joy and a wonderful support to innumerable other persons. And if the number of the persons with that realisation becomes even a little more, our world would easily enjoy more peace, more joy, more harmony. But it is absolutely thrilling to contemplate a whole world of souls, of Sri Krishna's Baikuntha Lok as it were. Here is an account of it:

All there was soul or made of sheer soul-stuff:
A sky of soul covered a deep soul-ground.
All here was known by a spiritual sense:
Thought was not there but a knowledge near and one
Seized on all things by a moved identity,
A sympathy of self with other selves,
The touch of consciousness on consciousness
And being's look on being with inmost gaze
And heart laid bare to heart without walls of speech
And the unanimity of seeing minds
In myriad forms luminous with the one God.

* * *

A quivering out from soul to answering soul,
A mystic movement, a close influence,
A free and happy and intense approach
Of being to being with no screen or check,

Without which life and love could never have been.
Body was not there, for bodies were needed not,
The soul itself was its own deathless form
And met at once the touch of other souls
Close, blissful, concrete, wonderfully true.

* * *

There was a strange spiritual scenery,
A loveliness of lakes and streams and hills,
A flow, a fixity in a soul-space,
And plains and valleys, stretches of soul-joy,
And gardens that were flower-tracts of the spirit,
The intimacy of God was everywhere,
No veil was felt, no brute barrier inert,
Distance could not divide, Time could not change.
A fire of passion burned in spirit-depths,
A constant touch of sweetness linked all hearts.
The throb of one adoration's single bliss
In a rapt ether of undying love.
An inner happiness abode in all,
A sense of universal harmonies,
A measureless secure eternity
Of truth and beauty and good and joy made one.

THE YOGIC APPROACH TO LIFE

Our ordinary approach in life is one of seeking immediate satisfactions of our impulses, of acquisition, possession, construction, destruction, eating, social companionship, activity, rest, etc., etc.

A child's behaviour is typical of it. Each impulse commands fully when it is awake and active. There is hardly any coordination among the impulses.

With the emergence of thinking and the activity of comparing and 'looking before and after' a coordination begins to come about. Social demands further help and we learn to restrain and regulate the original self-assertion of the impulses.

The adult person is a relatively unified individual, but there is so much impulsiveness, so much conflict, division, vacillation, regret in it. A whole-heartedness of thought, feeling and action is a rare experience. A whole-hearted, satisfied and effective living is only a vision and a possibility.

Our ordinary living is superficial. We live at the surface of our consciousness interested in the surface qualities of things and persons and seek usually our own immediate satisfactions of varied kinds. Our lives are thus much divided and egoistic, i.e., self-centred. A feeling for the good of life on the whole, its true fulfilment, is a different matter and has to be carefully cultivated.

The yogic living is essentially a deeper living, a calmer living, a more peaceful and detached living and, therefore, it commands a larger perspective, a fuller good and is more satisfying. It has a larger coordination among the varied impulses and has a greater unity, a greater self-control and more effectivity in life.

But the true seat of unity and integration and abiding self-satisfaction is the spiritual fact of human personality. Wherever it is active and prominent, it lends a marvellous charm and spontaneity and creativity to life. And to activate it is really all the secret and success of life. It is sometimes conspicuous in children at a stage. They are then strikingly attractive. But soon social prohibitions and inhibitions make them too dependent on the external things and they lose contact with their soul.

One might try to see what the yogic approach would be to the different problems and situations of life, to food and eating, to one's work, to social relations.

Food and eating become complicated and difficult because of our approach of greed for food and attachment to taste, of insistent likes and dislikes for superficial qualities of things. Now, if we are able to take an approach of a deeper poise of some detachment and freedom, shall we not be able to enjoy food more widely and also eat as needed.

Right attitude to work is again an invaluable asset of life. A deeper and a calmer poise always means more concentration and more effectivity and less anxiety and less worry. Surely that would be an advantage for professional work.

Social relations too would acquire a new meaning for the yogic approach to life. They would not be superficial and of petty likes and dislikes, but of a wider and a larger feeling for persons. Will that not make for better and more adjustable contacts in social life?

And what is of unique importance is that the yogic approach involves an awareness of a Higher Governance of life and is able to turn to it, more or less, for help in all difficulties in life.

But how to cultivate this most useful yogic approach to life?

Well, the most important thing is to have and cultivate a sense, a feeling and a seeking for the soul deep within us, in our heart. To cultivate a self-poise, a detachment from the circumstances, all things external, and have a feeling for oneself and one's deep-seated soul, the sweet centre of our life.

To a young man of Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, who happened to go to Europe to work there, the Mother said to him in a birthday message: "You find yourself in a new situation, swamped by new impressions all the time, but what does your soul say to all this?" In French, the Mother said, "Que dit votre âme?" (What does your soul say?)

The Mother had sought to make him aware of his soul and asked him to learn to consult it regarding all that was crowding upon his mind and determining all his life and behaviour.

The most important thing to cultivate really is — by whatever means we do — that there is a bright and a blissful central spiritual fact in our life — a soul — which should really inspire all our thoughts, feelings and actions. A keen persistent aspiration for it, a rejection of all feeling that external things alone matter, enjoyment of soul experiences in literature, art and music and a practice of concentration in the heart are useful exercises for the cultivation of the feeling for the soul or the yogic poise or posture for life.

And this cultivation or Sadhana, once one gets the deep joy of it, is not at all difficult. In fact, it can easily become spontaneous.

Sri Aurobindo's epic poem represents in moving words man's urge to find his soul:

The call comes in these words:

Why earnest thou to this dumb deathbound earth,
This ignorant life beneath indifferent skies
Tied like a sacrifice on the altar of Time,
O spirit, O immortal energy,
If 'twas to nurse grief in a helpless heart
Or with hard tearless eyes await thy doom?
Arise, O soul, and vanquish Time and Death.

* * *

Finding the soul then becomes a passion and Savitri, as seeker of the soul, traverses the inner realms of consciousness, one after the other, until she reaches the soul. Here are the thrilling lines depicting the last stages of her inward journey:

At last a change approached, the emptiness broke;
A wave rippled within, the world had stirred;
Once more her inner self became her space
There was felt a blissful nearness to the Goal;
Heaven leaned low to kiss the sacred hill,
The air trembled with passion and delight.

* * *

As if an old remembered dream come true,
She recognised in her prophetic mind
The imperishable lustre of that sky,
The tremulous sweetness of that happy air
And, covered from mind's view and life's approach,

The mystic cavern in the sacred hill
And knew the dwelling of her secret soul.

* * *

And when she found her soul, her entire vision of life changed.
Then all things appeared in a new light.

All things she saw as a masquerade of Truth
Disguised in the costumes of Ignorance
Crossing the years to immortality:
All she could front with the strong spirit's peace.

The yogic approach to life beginning as a little deeper poise of consciousness can, if pursued long enough, lead to such a marvellous realisation — a realisation of a Conscious Soul in a Conscious Universe, living as a master and a king, over the lesser manifestations of matter, life and mind.